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ABSTRACT

The superintendent is a crucial determinant in the performance of a district's professional staff. A good working relationship between the board and the superintendent is essential; they must realize they are, respectively, the lay members and the professional member of the same team. The superintendent is responsible for informing the board, acting on its decisions, initiating the formation of new policy and the review of old policy, implementing policy, and directing and coordinating the broad aspects of personnel, finance, curriculum, pupil services, building and grounds operation, transportation, and public relations. In addition, he or she must be the model for other administrators in the district. The most important part of a superintendent's job is knowing how to make effective use of staff, including choosing good staff, trusting and delegating to them, holding them accountable, and giving them credit for their accomplishments. Paramount to the success of public education today is the ability of the superintendent to communicate--with all the publics in the district, with the board, with staff, and with students. Newsletters help in this effort. The news media must be treated as an ally. In sum, the quality of the school district is a reflection of the superintendent of schools. (Author/JM)

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WHAT SHOULD YOUR BOARD EXPECT FROM ITS PROFESSIONAL STAFF

School boards may expect more from their professional staff than is humanly possible. If these expectations are kept in perspective, however, they can prompt a healthy and stimulating atmosphere . . . as onward or outward or upward growth is often the result of a reach that exceeds the grasp.

In essence, the professional staff is a reflection and extension of the chief administrator - the superintendent. If the board of education works with and through a knowledgeable and motivated superintendent, the performance of the professional staff will be instrumental in bringing the grasp of realization closer to the reach for achievement. Because the superintendent is so crucial to the performance of the staff and ultimately to the accomplishment of the primary objective of the board of education, the education of children and youth, we should consider this person in some detail.

I was reminded of a conversation between a fellow board member and a consultant assisting my local district in a superintendent search. The board and the consultant were developing the profile of the individual we were seeking to be the chief executive officer of our system. The list of strengths and desirable traits we believed to be essential was lengthy. The consultant commented that it appeared we were looking for someone who could walk on water. The board member responded, "No...just someone who knows where the rocks are!"

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Today, if we are to be successful in the education of the children and youth attending public schools, it is essential that there be a good working relationship between the local board of education and the superintendent of schools. For this relationship to exist both the board and the superintendent must accept the fact they are a team, and, as members of the team, they have specific roles to fill. The board of education is the legislative or policy making body. Acting in accordance with the board policies, the superintendent is the executive, or administrative body, of the school district. Neither, however, can be successful without a thorough understanding of, and support for, the other's role.

In continuing this delineation of the roles of the board and superintendent, it is important to recognize that board members are lay members of the team; the superintendent is the professional. The board of education "is asked to be responsive to its constituencies in governance; sensitive to the special needs of all learners in the district; a more active advocate for learners to the people, and other local governmental entities, and state and federal levels of government; and a vigorous ambassador explaining the instructional program to the people."¹ The superintendent, serving as the professional member, "is expected to display excellence as an educational leader; to be politically sophisticated; to be aware of, and active in, legislative developments; and to have an extensive knowledge of federal and state laws."² This establishes the superintendent as an advisor to the board. Thus, in both theory and practice, board members rely upon the superin-

tendent for information and advice in the decision making process.

It is the responsibility of the superintendent to provide the board with accurate and complete information about every issue that requires its consideration. In most cases, a board of education should be provided viable options on matters brought to it for action, with the superintendent making a firm recommendation from among the alternatives, based on a valid assessment of the situation. The board should expect the superintendent to state clearly his reasons for making the recommendation. A board should seldom find itself in the position of making a decision on a critical issue where there is only one possible solution. Once the superintendent has provided the necessary information, the board should consider all aspects of the issue thoroughly and then adopt or reject the superintendent's recommendation. It is then the superintendent's obligation to implement the decision, even those with which he does not agree.

If a school system is to be consistent, fair, and just in dealing with people and issues, it must have a well defined and up-to-date set of policies. Generally the superintendent initiates the systematic review and revision of existing policy and the formation of new policy.

Once the board has taken affirmative action, the superintendent, previously acting in an advisory capacity to the board, assumes an executive role. It now becomes his responsibility to develop the administrative procedures necessary to implement the policy. The

board should be given the opportunity to review the administrative procedures developed by the superintendent. But, the board must not become involved in the general administrative functions required to successfully implement its policy and operate the schools. The board should, however, hold the superintendent accountable for the implementation of all policy.

The superintendent, as the chief executive officer of the board of education, should direct and coordinate the broad aspects or personnel, finance, curriculum, pupil services, building and grounds, transportation and public relations. "The superintendent must realize that he cannot personally participate in each phase of the school program. As much as possible he should confine his efforts to general administration. He should be familiar enough with the duties of subordinates to be able to judge their performance but he should not be doing their work. The board should provide the necessary staff to perform the various duties associated with the management and supervision of a well run organization. It is just as important that the superintendent delegate duties as it is for the board to delegate to the superintendent. The superintendent that becomes too involved with minor details will not be able to see the overall program, plan for the future of the district, and work with outside agencies that affect schools. The superintendent's time should be devoted to the administrative function of the school and the other aspects of the program delegated to staff members." 3

The superintendent is, indeed, the model for the administrative staff. The example he sets will largely set the pattern of action for the central office and building level administrators. He must accept the fact that example is more effective and more powerful than formal instruction, in-service training, command, advice or persuasion. The superintendent might well remember the adage, "Monkey see; monkey do!" His human relation skills, communication skills, efficiency, dedication, ethics and, ultimately, his ability to be the effective educational leader of the school system will be observed and imitated by the staff. The superintendent is as much a teacher as if he were in the classroom.

A superintendent is successful to the degree that he is able to conduct a comprehensive needs assessment; analyze the results; develop goals to meet the needs; identify the strengths and weaknesses of his staff; and then delegate to them accordingly to accomplish the desired outcome.

Carroll Johnson, professor of education emeritus at Columbia University, states that, "Two-thirds of a superintendent's job is knowing how to make effective use of his staff. The essential ingredients of making that portion of the job work (are):

- choosing good staff;
- trusting the people you have chosen;
- delegating authority to them;
- holding them accountable;
- giving them credit.

"While holding his staff accountable, the successful superintendent also knows the ultimate responsibility for failure is his - no matter how generous he is in extending to others the credit for success. ...But, superintendents should remember that it is the experience of possessing only limited power - while accepting full responsibility - that is the mark of a good superintendent and mature leader."

The superintendent who is proficient in the selection of qualified and capable central office and building level administrative staff and in the delegation of responsibilities to the proper individuals will find that he is able to plan, idealistically and realistically, to study, to observe, to prepare, to analyze, and to appraise. When this happens, growth will occur - personal growth for the superintendent; growth for administrative staff members; and growth for the district.

Let me share with you a question asked of me several years ago by a long time patron of our district. It was during a period when our board and administration were receiving less than "rave" reviews in regard to communications, both internally and externally. The patron was aware of the fact that individuals received no compensation for serving on the board of education and earned their livelihood from some other source. We had just completed a meeting where the board, and particularly the superintendent, had not gained any support from the patrons as a result of our discussion and subsequent action. The patron asked me who was sitting to my

left. I explained that it was the superintendent of schools. She then asked me what he did for a full time job!!

Any superintendent with an open door, easily accessible to the patrons, and highly visible in the community, will not experience this complete lack of identity!

Paramount to the success of public education today is the ability of the superintendent to communicate effectively with all the publics within the district. The superintendent must recognize that the art of communicating is composed of several separate and distinct skills. It is being adept in both the written and spoken word; it is recognizing the importance of being a receptive listener as well as the disseminator of information. The superintendent, because of his position, is the individual considered to be the most important source of information. It is his approach to communicating this information to the various audiences that establishes a positive or negative reaction from those publics. If his door stands open, if he is easily accessible, indeed if his method is open and forthright, he will establish a climate in which everyone will feel informed, involved, and important.

The superintendent is the key communicator with the board. Information passes from the board through the superintendent to the administrative staff and the various publics within the district. Likewise, the superintendent must communicate to the board information directed to him from staff, patrons, and governmental agencies which affects the operation of the district.

A weekly newsletter provides the board with a direct line to the superintendent and keeps the board current with the operation of the school system. The board, working as a team with the superintendent who keeps it well informed, is able to be proactive rather than reactive in the governance of the district.

The superintendent must be involved in both internal and external communications. An informed, involved staff is a supportive staff. A staff shut off from easy access to the superintendent, and kept from participating in the decision making process is non-supportive. The superintendent who shows appreciation to his staff will find this same staff more ready to accept criticism and suggestions for improvement. Just as the superintendent keeps the board informed about what is happening within the district, he must also keep the staff informed concerning action taken by the board. A newsletter distributed to every member of the staff immediately following a board meeting, stating board actions clearly and concisely, tells the staff they are an important part of the school system.

The superintendent must communicate externally with students, parent and patrons of the district. He must not only communicate to these publics what is happening within their school district, he must also provide them a means to communicate their concerns about, and support for, the educational process. Again, the superintendent who is highly visible and easily accessible nurtures positive attitudes toward the school from these publics.

Lastly, the superintendent must accept the news media as a friend, not as a foe! He must provide the media with advance notice of board meetings. He must not only be accessible to reporters, he must also foster a supportive relationship by providing them with positive news releases concerning the schools.

With the exception of communicating with the board of education for which the superintendent alone is responsible, all members of the administrative staff, both central office and building level, have a responsibility to communicate effectively, internally and externally.

In closing, I would like to say that I believe that a school district is a reflection of the superintendent of schools. If students are receiving a quality education, there is a quality person at the helm. If there is an eagerness on the part of staff to accomplish their tasks; if there is an eagerness on the part of students to learn; if there is an eagerness on the part of parents and patrons to support the schools, there is an eagerness for learning radiating downward and outward from the superintendent's office.

That individual establishes the educational climate within your local district.

Appreciate him, support him. If you don't, some other board will!

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